

# Meet Your Neighbor: Daun Thomas Frankland

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By Betsey Lyon

Daun Thomas Frankland, President and Superintendent of Columbia Gardens Cemetery, grew up in Ashton Heights on the cemetery grounds, later lived far and wide, and is now back home, enjoying life in Arlington. Frankland and husband Wally raised their daughter Leslie in Paris after living in California, Germany, Kansas, The Netherlands, and DC.

The Alexandria Park Association created Columbia Gardens Cemetery in 1917 during World War I, with Daun's Great Grandfather, Judge Harry Randolph Thomas a co-founder. He served as trustee and caretaker of the 38-acre cemetery, a job that has stayed in the Thomas family, often with the caretaker living in the Superintendent's house. These days, Daun and her husband live in a condominium on Arlington's urban corridor.

Born in Key West, Florida, Daun moved as a baby with her parents to the Columbia Gardens property when her father took over as Superintendent. While attending local schools, she and her two brothers found growing up with the cemetery property as their backyard "fantastic," Daun recalls. With friends or alone, they would run or bicycle around their expansive acreage for exercise and creative play. "Essentially, we lived and played in the middle of a large park right in the middle of Arlington."

She felt well prepared professionally to take over Columbia Gardens management when brother Ned retired from running it in 2015, following their mother's death. Daun says that heading Columbia Gardens calls on her extensive customer service experience and problem-solving skills, with the added challenge of helping customers through their most emotionally delicate times.

Daun is grateful to be continuing her family's 103-year legacy in Arlington. She and Wally were a typical Army family, moving frequently, and then happily spent many years in Paris while he was on staff with the American Military Battle Monuments Commission. An Art History and Studio Arts major in college, Daun founded and operated both Thomas Matthews Antiques and Paris at Your Feet, an interior design business serving customers in Paris and then in Kensington, MD. Daughter Leslie completed high school in Paris and graduated from West Point in 2018.

As the cemetery business evolves, Daun enjoys being a change agent focused on keeping the business thriving and relevant to customers, as well as welcoming to the community. She appreciates helping their increasingly diverse clientele incorporate family and cultural practices and traditions into their loved ones' end-of-life ceremonies and celebrations. Families now often seek space for funeral gatherings outside of churches, so Columbia Gardens plans to reconfigure part of the Superintendent's house for more event space.

The property maintains a memorial rose garden planted by Daun's grandfather in 1967, with local rose expert Pam Powers overseeing its care. Visitors may notice that many trees in the cemetery are tagged, part of the cemetery's arboretum status, official designation Daun and Wally worked to achieve after exploring the arboretum at West Point.

Today, Columbia Gardens continues as a nonprofit organization on private property employing nine people full time and several college and high school students in summer. Daun and her team heartily welcome visitors to explore nature in the cemetery, with deference for any funerals in progress. See you there on your next walk!

